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Global warming

Among the real concerns of the after-effect of the Sidr hurricane, the political turmoil, the price hike of essentials and the misdeeds of the ex-politicians, most people tend to forget that we, mankind, are at the end of our current pattern of growth and so called civilisation.

Global warming is real and is here. And while the developed world is busy finding ways to cut down the carbon footprint of their countries and individuals, is it not time for Bangladesh to think laterally too for a change and NOT follow the normal course of events in the development game? Should we really be thinking about more ways to use energies? And how do we fulfil that demand for energy we burn more of the world's fossil fuel. Thus we contribute towards the net Global Warming, helping to bring about the 'Keyamot' the day of reckoning as predicted.

It is estimated that when (not if) the icecaps melt at the present rate, the sea level will rise by 7 to 8 metres. Most of Bangladesh is only around 2 metres above the current sea level? Therefore it does not take a genius to work out that most of Bangladesh will become part of the Bay of Bengal. It is also very likely that Sidr is perhaps a wake up call. And what about the Metro System? Well we have yet to invent a

Metro System that floats.

I think the solution to the current congestion problem of Dhaka, and remember Dhaka is not the whole of Bangladesh, just the capital, ought to be brought about by some lateral thinking. Our scholars are quite capable of producing the right solutions for us. I suspect there might be decentralisation of the government, congestion charges for the city centres, and bringing back the good old rickshaws are a few of the many possibilities who knows!

Even the mighty Americans (20% of the earth's net energy consumers and thus polluters) are to be alarmed at last about Global Warming. Thank God!

Hazra Awal
Cambridge, UK

Choose the right leaders

The tentative schedule of national election has been announced already. The Election Commission (EC) is making all the arrangements for this election. Meanwhile, it is important to know the background of the participating political leaders. It is also essential to know their stand for the development of Bangladesh. The citizens of Bangladesh have a right to know about their representative leaders in details before they cast their

vote. In this regard, several open debates over mass communication media (e.g. radio, television and internet) are needed. The position of a Prime Minister and the positions of other ministries are vital for the development of a country. These positions should be given to the right persons with adequate qualifications. There should not be privilege that the political party head or the party chief should be the Prime Minister when an election is won. A political leader should have adequate educational, and other necessary qualifications to become the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Political leaders' opinions on various issues (e.g. corruption, price hike of essentials, student politics, visions for next five years etc.) should be known and broadcast throughout the country. Debate between the leaders on mass media is a common practice in developed nations (e.g. United States of America, Canada, and United Kingdom). I request the EC to arrange open debates among the party leaders after they submit their nominations, this will help the citizens of Bangladesh to select a better leader. In addition the EC should encourage the participants to disclose their wealth information before election.

Mohammad Habibur Rahman
One-mail

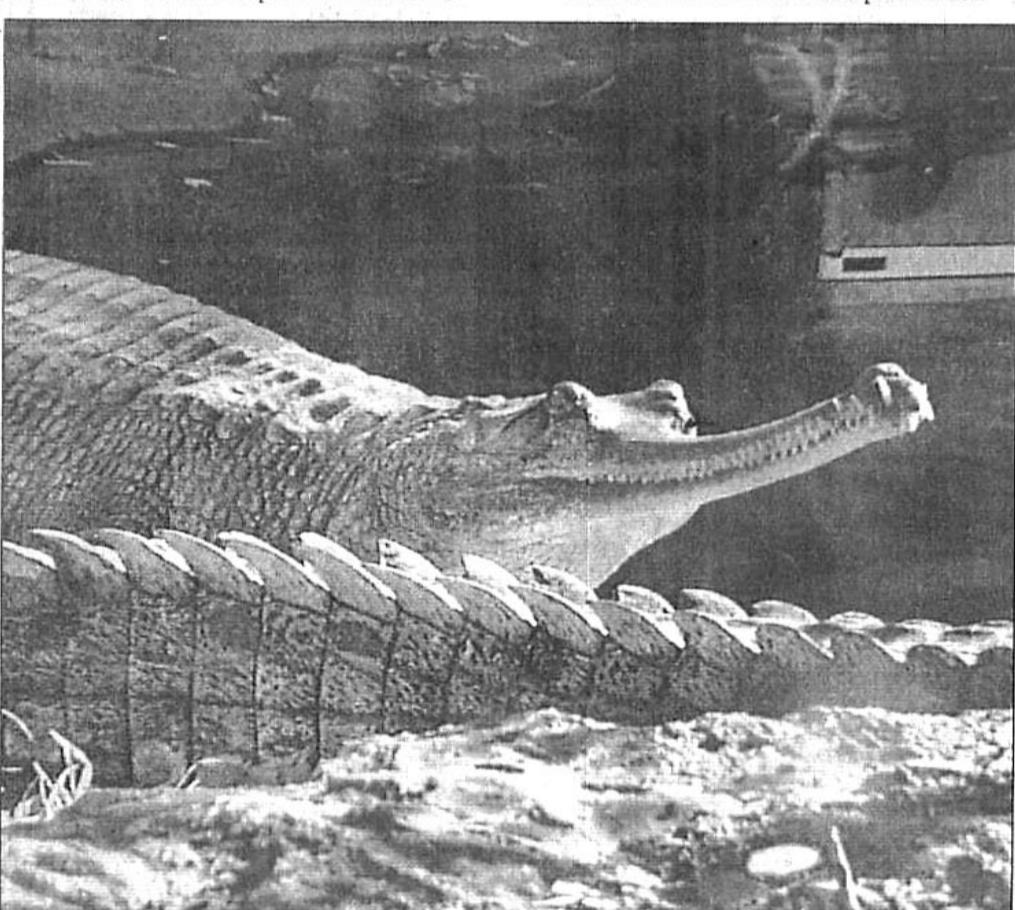
Save 'gharials'

The geographical range of the distribution of gharials (*Gavialis gangeticus*) has dwindled within the natural range countries Pakistan, Bhutan, India and Nepal but more significantly in Bangladesh. Wild populations can only be found now in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Only few pairs in the wild are reported to be surviving in the Padma-Jamuna river system, Bangladesh. Gharials have been listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List 2007 and have again been identified as the most threatened crocodilian species in the world in a recent resolution of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and World Conservation Union (IUCN) (October 2007). With the rapid increase in the

tem as well as physical alteration of the river habitat due to erosion, sand mining, etc. The intensity in fishing activities, river traffic has also increased adding to the plight of the survival of the gharials. Further, reports of sightings of gharials and entangling in fishing nets have also appeared in the national dailies from areas not previously recorded.

It is high time that initiatives be taken to:

- * Conduct a detailed population survey.
- * Assess the threats to its survival.
- * Develop management plan.
- * Assist the relevant authorities in conserving the gharials in Bangladesh.
- * Assist the zoos to initiate captive breed-



magnitude of threatening ecological and social factors, the gharials in Bangladesh are facing their worst nightmare and are at the verge of extinction.

No detailed surveys have ever been conducted to ascertain the population of the surviving gharials in Bangladesh.

Information from some sporadic reconnaissance surveys at some specific locations in the 1980s (Khan 1982, Rashid et al 1984, Faiz & Rahman 1985) exist but those are more than two decades old. In the meantime there has been a lot of changes in the river ecosys-

ting programme.

* Initiate programmes to involve local people and NGOs in conservation activities.

Gharials are a notable asset of our natural heritage and a flagship species for our river ecosystem. Once lost it will be gone forever and so will be our pride that we could not do anything to save this amazing species within its natural distribution range - Bangladesh.

S. M. A. Rashid, Ph.D.
Baitul Aman Housing Society
Adabor, Mohammadpur
Dhaka

nation and thousands have died and/or have been maimed. Let us ignite our moral fabric, grasp the reality of the cyclone affected people and do whatever in our capacity to help our brothers and sisters leading tormented, desperate and hungry lives. Let us assuage them for losing their near and dear ones.

It is my recommendation that each institution, village, person and community come ahead to support with food, clothing, shelter and education for the children of these affected community. We need to worry about finding these people work as relief itself can sustain for only weeks or months but the labour market and the economy of the area has to continue. I have read that electricity in some areas has been severed and that the connections are being

slowly given. I would urge the government to give utmost importance to this matter and plan to create jobs for the people of the community. Special efforts by the citizens of Bangladesh may be given to accommodate some of these affected people in business enterprises in the area and even at other industrial areas and larger cities. Let us show our citizens' responsibility by working alongside the government. I would also like to appeal the college and university students, especially students of medical colleges to come forward and assist the sick and diseased in these desperate hours in the history of Bangladesh.

Ziaur Rahman
CEO, IITM
Lake Circus, West Panthapath
Dhaka

Facing calamities



PHOTO: AFP

The calamity that has once more left lives in Bangladesh ravaged calls for some serious rethinking on our part insofar as tackling natural disaster is concerned. There is, of course, no way in which we can prevent nature from venting its fury. Throughout the ages Bangladesh has been battered by floods, cyclones, tidal surges and the like, and the consequence of it all has always been a trail of devastation left behind. People have died, while those who survived were left homeless and destitute. It is today a tale of all comprehensive misery. With each day that passes, the body count from the disaster gets to be higher. As far as crops are concerned, they have simply been destroyed.

The government's response to the tragedy has been swift, which is a far cry from the tardiness that characterised action over the natural disaster which battered the country, when it was part of Pakistan, in November 1970. It is a relief to see the various departments of the government coming together to help mitigate the sufferings of those whose lives have been battered by the cyclone. Moreover, the speedy response of the international community to the tragedy is reflective of how seriously the cyclone has been taken note of by governments outside Bangladesh.

On the face of it, therefore, everything seems

to be working out all right and we should not have any reason for worry. That may be so, but only up to a point. What now needs to be done is for us as a nation to go back to a sense of morality and truly feel within ourselves that a tragedy has occurred and that we need to put in our bit toward lessening the miseries of those affected. The first step in that direction must of course be an emphasis on austerity, it is galling to see that despite the enormity of the cyclone and the resultant tragedy, there is hardly any sign of commiseration with the victims anywhere. Life has gone on as usual, with people staying glued to the consumer culture that has in recent years taken hold of urban society in particular.

Marriage ceremonies on an ostentatious scale have been going on and no one has felt any contrition about such a situation.

We expect relief operations to go ahead in order for people in the cyclone battered areas to return to a semblance of normalcy. We also think that it becomes the responsibility of the government, political parties, social organisations and individuals to go for a major thrust in rekindling the moral fibre of the nation. It is conscience that is all. When that goes missing, it is the collective future of a nation that is jeopardized.

Shafinur Rashid, *Uttara, Dhaka*

Eid-ul-Azha

Cyclone Sidr has killed over 450,000 livestock and poultries, wiping out a major source of income for millions of affected families. Bangladeshi people and their friends all over the world have responded to assist the affected people in restoring their lives and livelihood. Even the poor people have come forward with whatever little they have to help the cyclone-affected families. Most impressive was a gesture from some VGF card holders in non-affected areas who volunteered to give up their cards as their contribution to cyclone relief activities. This is the Bangladeshi spirit that we are all so proud of and has been upheld again.

Now Eid-ul-Azha is coming in less than two weeks' time. Millions of livestock-cows, goats and sheep in particular-are typically sacrificed on this occasion. I was watching recently a late night TV talk show. In that show, Farida Akhter, a prominent woman leader, suggested that perhaps this year we could sacrifice these livestock not by slaughtering but by donating them to families who have lost their livestock in the cyclone. I think it is an excellent idea.

This way we do not incur any additional cost for helping the cyclone affected families while at

the same time complying with religious requirement of sacrificing our wealth on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha. After all, the spirit of Eid-ul-Azha is to sacrifice particularly to favour the poor and the deprived.

Zahid Hussain
Banani, Dhaka

Trees

The paltry numbers of trees that can be spotted bear a queer burden upon them, to say the least! As they are being subjected to a natural decay owing to the biological grounds, they are unfortunately falling victims to the burden inflicted by the humans as well. The point gets clear if one extends the antenna of one's observation- see how the lone and withered trees in the urban towns are burdened by the sign boards that they are forced to carry on their weary frames. There are, interestingly, the signboards of the coaching centres of a variety of tantalising and at times ridiculous names: sure success, never do fail, nexus, peerless, the list would rather go on and on!

These few trees living on their own to generate oxygen to the humans should be left alone on their own --- we should not do injustice to the ones that are helping to live, and we are piercing them headlong --- a display of

sheer cruelty that needs to be stopped.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Literature page

On the eve of every national and religious festival, I observe your literature page editor takes the initiative to publish special supplement for the readers which is full of the best short stories and a bag of pleasures.

I hope we will get something special on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha also.

Md. Golam Mostafa
Senior Executive Officer
Prime Bank Limited
Uttara Branch
Dhaka

Our archaeological heritage

We read from newspaper that some people in the culture ministry had made an agreement with a French museum under which some of our ancient pieces would be sent to France for demonstration.

That museum will demonstrate our valuable assets to the French people.

This is not acceptable to us.

Sumon Dutta
One-mail

Biharis in Bangladesh

Jamshaid Taher of Banani, Dhaka wants the camps closed and the Biharis dispersed (Star Dec. 1). This expression of intolerance and disregard for the needs of fellow humans is appalling. Is their plight not bad enough as it is without attacking the unfortunate community? They would find work easily, he says. No one would discriminate against them, would they? They would be welcomed by the majority community. I do not think so.

I have less than no reason to love these people. My family and I were nearly killed by members of this community in Mirpur during the first stages of the war of liberation. But basic human rights cannot be ignored because of personal feelings or bigotry. The problem of assimilation of the community is a complex one and can only be approached from a just perspective.

Mir Abdur Rashid Mostafa
IT consultant
Blackheath, New South Wales
Australia

their heinous work in our liberation war. All the political parties and leaders (except a few) demanded trial of war criminals. But the caretaker govt did not accept that. Their opinion is that "they are here to organise a free and fair election. They cannot take extra burden". They also said it is the task of a political govt. In my point of view it is true. But one think the CTG can do. They can organise a mass vote whether the people of Bangladesh want the trial of war criminals or not. People will decide about those criminals. Which will be very helpful for a political govt to take a decision about the war criminals. The CTG is doing so many things for the welfare of Bangladesh. We hope that the CTG will do this also for our collective good.

Abrar
Dept. of Economics (4th Year)
University of Rajshahi

Retirement age

The present non-political government is very passionately considering extension of retirement age limit of the government service holders from 57 to 62 years. It is indeed a very encouraging and pragmatic consideration of the present government in the light of the increased life expectancy of the people due to availability of better healthcare facilities. I personally welcome the decision but in view of limited job opportunities in public sectors, I would like to take the privilege of expressing my reservation without any prejudice on raising the retirement age to 62 years for the following reasons:

Bangladesh is a developing country and its economy has been very steadily moving upwards but still there are many impediments which are hindering expected economic growth (GDP), basically resulting from man made political disturbances and natural disaster. Therefore job opportunities are not expanding fast.

Every year a large number of fresh young job seekers with graduate and post-graduate degrees enter the job market from public and private universities and most of them are keen to appear in the BCS exams as their first choice or to join in other government departments and corporation instead of private agencies. Of course, the situation is changing with the expansion of private sectors but still fresh graduates prefer to join public sector and services.

If the retirement age is raised to 62 years, the job opportunities would come down to some extent and that will have consequential effect on the age limit to apply for any such job and hence the entry age should also be increased to 30 years simultaneously.

Therefore, I would like to urge the government to consider enhancing retirement age of the government employees to 60 years instead of 62.

Nasar
One-mail

Relief fund

As an avid watcher of Bangladeshi politics, as well as its people's well-being, I have a question about relief fund.

As a result of the good work of the present caretaker government, crores and crores of taka has been recovered from different corrupt sources. Does it seem a good idea to allocate all this money for the Sidr victims?

This is money that no government could have expected to be raised from the national budget.

It will also show that Bangladesh is not the "poor man" in the international community, depending on doles from the rest of the world to help its own citizens.

Dr. Jan Hofstijzer, Belgium

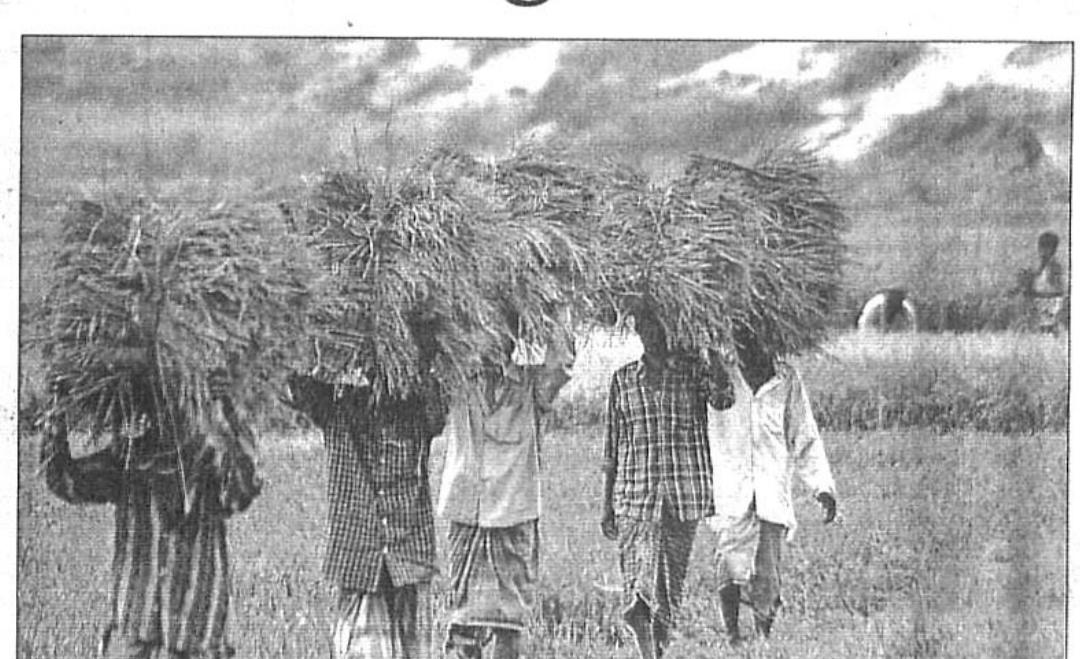
Global conference on agriculture

Bangladesh being not so a rich country cannot bear frequent losses in the agriculture sector due to natural calamities like flood, cyclone, draught, etc.

The global climate change has created a serious negative impact on Bangladesh agriculture. By changing the cropping pattern, we may reduce the loss due to environmental hazards up to some extent. But this will not yield a very positive result on our crop production. Generation of new and appropriate technology is time consuming and costly as well. So, at this critical hour, it has become essential to identify and share technologies among the agro-based countries of the world. The developed countries which are contributing the lion's share in the creation of climatic havoc should come forward in aid of the affected countries.

In my opinion, the United Nations should organise a global conference on how to face agricultural challenges in the coming days.

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Chairman
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